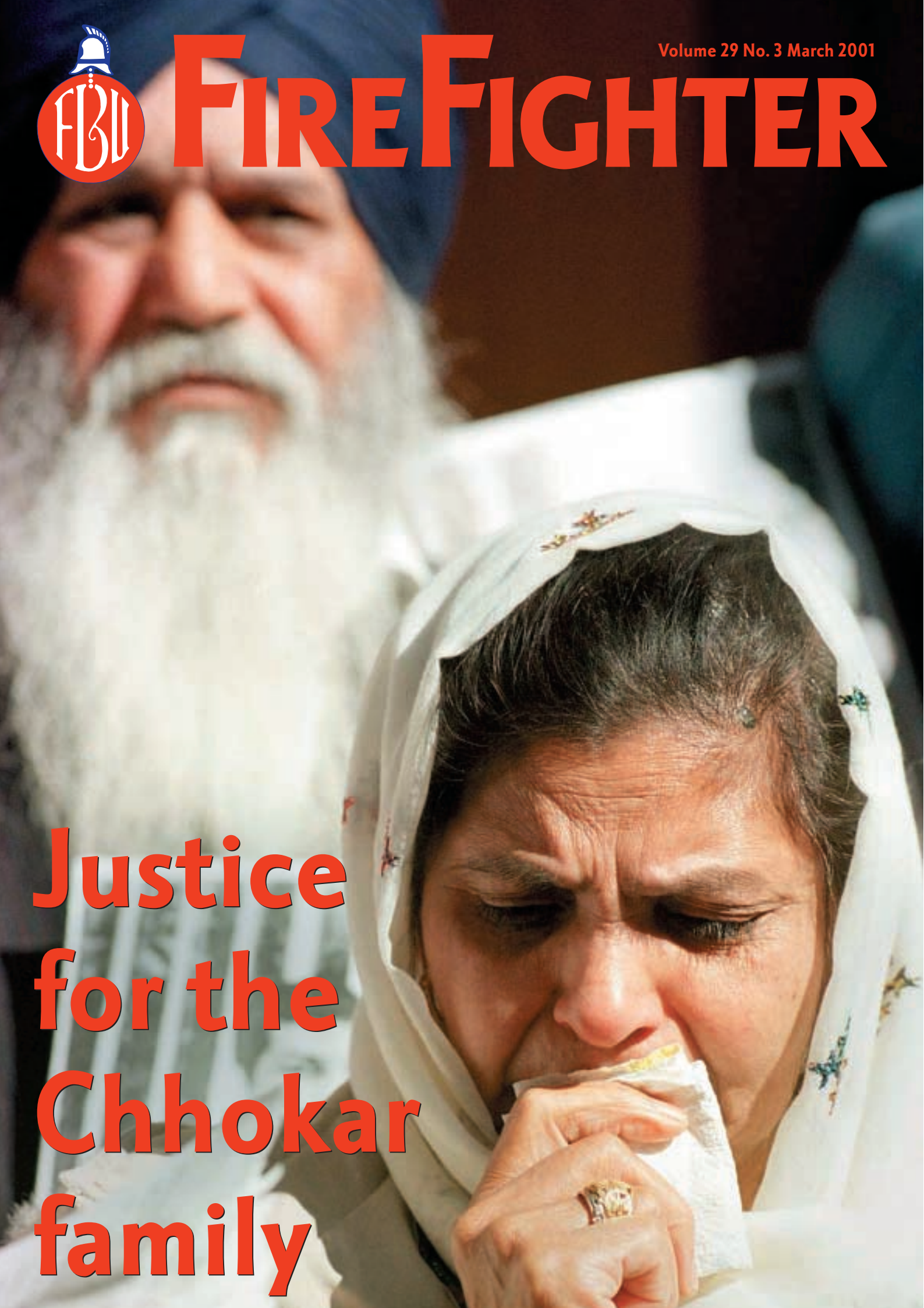




Volume 29 No. 3 March 2001

# FIRE FIGHTER

**Justice  
for the  
Chhokar  
family**



## GENERAL SECRETARY

# NEW VISION MUST BRING NEW

THE Minister with responsibility for the Fire Service is currently setting out his "Vision" for the future of the UK Fire Service. This will set out objectives which will have far reaching consequences for everyone in the Service. As soon as the published document is available we will be instigating widespread discussion on its contents throughout the FBU but to give members a flavour of what is envisaged here are some **initial** reactions to the initial draft proposals.

We are enthusiastic about the concept of a Vision for the UK Fire Service. The FBU is quite used to this strategic approach – it is something we do ourselves in documents such as "A Service for the sixties" and "The Future of the UK Fire Service". It is an approach which we feel is beneficial. Too often we spend too long tangled up in tactics so that we lose sight of any overall strategy. The "Vision" document will give us an opportunity to take stock.

**If far-reaching changes are upon us then hard work will be needed to ensure change is positive and that it commands support. In this age of spin or "Grand Illusion" as I prefer to call it, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION is essential.**

The main priorities for the FBU must be **RESPECT** and **INCLUSIVENESS** of our members. This is in itself a big change and a big challenge for the Fire Service and one it has yet to prove it can meet.

### **We are concerned**

That no Parliamentary time has been set aside for the Fire Safety Bill – Regulation is OK but it is hardly visionary.

### **We are concerned**

That despite the unequivocal objective of the Government to making the Service representative of our communities and indeed targeting resources and formulating a plan of how to achieve this, there are Brigades who have failed to submit vital information on monitoring and implementation of equality targets. This is unacceptable. Cynics would, however, say it is sadly all too predictable.

### **We are concerned**

**That there will be proposals resulting from the Vision which will increase insecurity and suspicion among a workforce where morale is low because of what seems like constant battering over a 25 year period.**



**The main priorities for the FBU must be respect and inclusiveness of our members.**

**This is in itself a big change and a big challenge for the Fire Service and one it has yet to prove it can meet.**

### **We are concerned**

That too many members are maimed and killed needlessly – we will pursue this vigorously – both organisations and individuals. If culpability is established their families deserve nothing less.

### **We are concerned that**

We are still having to fight for proper funding, proper equipment and proper facilities – and we will continue to do so.

### **We are concerned**

**That Best Value will become "Cuts" by another name. Recent pronouncements confirm this.**



# FIREFIGHTER

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# APPROACH

## We are concerned

**That any strategic involvement of the FBU will be seen by some as automatic endorsement of all aspects of the Vision.**

We are a democratic, representative union and we do not want responsibility without power.

## We are concerned

**About possible adverse changes to our pay and conditions, our pensions, our job security as opposed to positive recognition of the increasingly technical and skilled demands on fire-fighters and control staff.**

## We want

- **To provide a first class Fire Service for the public**
- Our members to be treated as the first class public servants that they are
- We want a Fire Service that is more egalitarian, more representative, where respect is afforded as a right not simply because of rank
- A Service where bullying will not flourish
- Where our "on the ground" experience is valued – as with our draft Fire Safety Bill
- Proper funding and proper equipment, proper facilities
- Support for our officials who as trade unionists are working to make the Service a safer and fairer place
- The Service to stay accountable to the communities we serve and to enhance local democracy.

The FBU is a political trade union – frankly there can be no other kind!

Our rulebook says that the FBU has, I quote,  
*"... as its ultimate aim the bringing about of the Socialist system of society"*

We hope the Prime Minister will be pleased to hear that the FBU has always and will always believe that socialism is all about responsibilities – we have never shrunk from this. Nor will we shrink from the possibilities as well as the problems that the Vision will bring.

**Andy Gilchrist**  
 General Secretary

# Dr. Yousef Allan

MANY members may have heard by now about the sad death of Dr. Yousef Allan at his home in Dublin. Yousef was the Delegate-General of Palestine in Ireland and also represented the Palestinian Trade Union Movement in the United Kingdom.

Yousef was a friend of the Trade Union Movement, but was a particular friend of the Fire Brigades Union and a very personal friend of mine. Delegates to our Annual Conference will remember him attending on numerous occasions either to speak from the platform or at our solidarity night on the Wednesday evening.

Those of us who knew Yousef well are all shocked and saddened to hear of his untimely death. To each of us there is personal grief at the loss of this energetic, warm and good-humoured man. He was a popular figure and had friends across all political parties. His laugh will ring in our ears for years to come.

He campaigned ceaselessly to raise the Palestinian cause across the political spectrum and it is largely thanks to him that there is such strong support for the Palestinians amongst political parties and trade union members in this country.

In the early eighties it was Yousef, assisted by ourselves in the FBU, who managed to change the policies of the Labour Party Conference and the Trades Union Congress in support of an independent state for the people of Palestine.

Yousef was extremely depressed at the situation in Palestine just prior to his death. The subsequent election of Sharon has borne out his worst fears.

Two memorial gatherings have been held in the House of Commons in order to mark Yousef's life. The attendance and the many humorous and sad stories related by those who attended showed how much people cared for Yousef.

The whole of the Trade Union and Labour Movement will sorely miss this great Ambassador for his cause and for many other causes that he took an interest in.

**KEN CAMERON**

**Ex-General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union**

**COVER:** Gurdav Chhokar at the Lord Advocate's office in Edinburgh. She and her family, backed by organisations like the FBU, are campaigning for justice for their son Surjit Chhokar who was murdered in Wishaw, Lanarkshire in 1999. Full story: Page 8. Picture: PAPhotos



FBU CONFIDENTIAL FREEPHONE HELPLINE

**0 8 0 0 7 8 3 4 7 7 8**

FAIRNESS AT WORK is about treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – with respect



## WILTSHIRE COLLABORATION PROJECT



Wiltshire Control Staff at work in their control room (below)

# Branch warns brigade over sharing plans

**Val Hampshire**  
**Branch Rep Wiltshire Fire Control**

THE Wiltshire collaboration project was started by management at a well-publicised launch in December 1998 where the dreadful phrase "ONE CALL BRINGS THEM ALL" was born.

From the very beginning all of the Fire Control Staff had very grave concerns as to the viability of the project and they vociferously put objections forward to management.

Wiltshire Fire Brigade management assured all members that their worries and fears would be looked into and allayed. And there followed several months of consultation meetings with the Control Staff. At these meetings all of their concerns were raised time and time again. At no time during these meetings did the Fire Control Staff refuse to move; all they requested was their own Fire Service Control Room, own facilities and their own stand down room. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Appleby, who is the lead officer on the project for Wiltshire Fire Brigade, conceded only to allow the staff a stand down room.

In an attempt to appease the situation Wiltshire Fire Brigade's project team came up with the idea of taking Union Officials and Fire Control Staff to Holland to see joint controls in operation and to prove to us that it worked.

So in April 2000 two Control Room members and two Union Officials and a few members of Wiltshire Fire Brigade project



team set off on a three-day visit to Holland. We visited a very small control in Drenthe and a larger control in The Hague.

The trip to Holland proved to both the Control members and the Union Officials that our concerns were indeed correct. The Fire Control Staff in Holland strongly advised us not to go ahead, as being in the same room does not work.

Yet again the Fire Brigades Union and the Control Staff regularly attended consultation meetings with management but they still seem unable to listen to our professional concerns and advice.

This now brings us up to date and following a branch meeting on 22nd January 2001 the Fire Control Room members voted for the following resolution.

*"This Branch condemns the current position of Wiltshire Fire Brigade and Fire Authority in its intransigence in terms of the proposed move from the present Fire Control to a shared facility. After numerous attempts to present our professional objections towards critical changes, we feel that our positions as experts has been undermined and ignored. We therefore give formal notice to the Chief Fire Officer that this Branch will not move from its present location."*

# Welcome to the fifth column

THE dictionary says "organised hindrance of the national effort by subversive propaganda".

Now, while we don't want you to hinder the national effort or become a subversive overnight, we are inviting you to spill the beans.

We're trying to introduce a kind of "diary" section into the Firefighter where you can write in and spill the beans on crazy goings on in your Brigade, Division, Command, whatever.

We're not looking for locker room stories or tales of great nights out but the kind of off-the-wall decisions, procedures, instructions, etc, that we all know go on all over the British Fire Service.

You don't have to be a journalist to contribute to this new section, just give us the basics and we'll try to tidy them up for inclusion in THE FIFTH COLUMN. Essays won't be expected, snippets will do. Things like ...

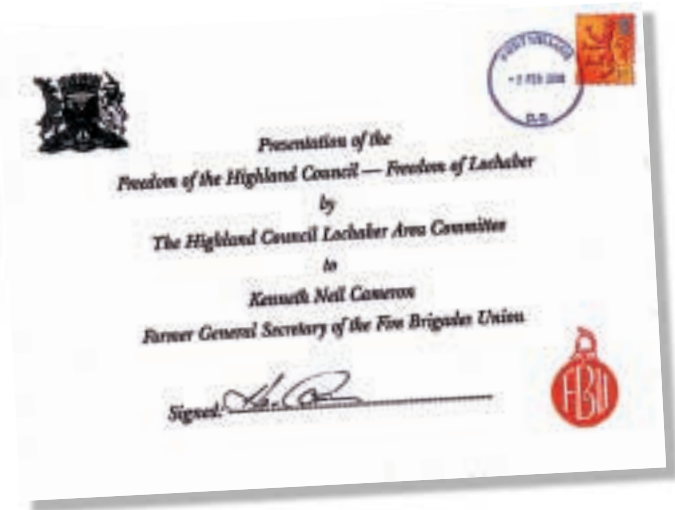
"Is it true that a Brigade not a million miles from the North East of Scotland uses white fire appliances because they can be seen more easily, or is it because it's cheaper to buy white ones than it is to have them painted red?"

Got the idea? Good.

Now, like everything else in the Firefighter this column will only work if your contributions keep pouring in. So get writing! We'd like to make this a regular feature in the magazine but can't do it without your help.

We won't accept anonymous contributions but can assure you that no names will be used in the column. We will, of course, check the details of your contributions – that's easier than fighting a libel case.

■ Write to THE FIFTH COLUMN, c/o The Editor, The Firefighter, Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE.



## Free Ken Cameron

YOU'LL recall reading in a recent edition of Firefighter about the great honour being bestowed on our ex General Secretary – The Freedom of Lochaber.

Well, Friday 2nd February 2001 saw the big day arrive.

Amidst a gathering of Councillors, local trade unionists, the Chamber of Commerce and a host of friends, Ken joined the ranks of such notables as Colonel Sir Donald W. Cameron of Lochail, KT, Provost Margaret Murphie and the Queen's Own Highlanders.

Thankfully the speeches were short and even humorous as everyone entered into the spirit of the event. Everyone in the FBU has their own favourite Ken Cameron story, in Fort William all of the locals have a Ken Cameron story – but none of them can be reproduced here.

Thanks are due to Highland Council (Lochaber Area) for the recognition of the contribution that Comrade Ken has made to trade unionism, internationalism and advancing the good name of the Lochaber area.



## WOMEN'S SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS

# Shaping the future

## Linda Shanahan

THE 73rd STUC Women's Conference took place in Perth in November 2000. Due to local difficulties the conference took place a week later in the normal conference calendar, which unfortunately meant that it coincided with the FBU sectional conferences at Wortley Hall. With regular delegates away on FBU business a slightly depleted and inexperienced delegation stepped in, exacerbated by one of our delegates, Franca Cianni, being taken to hospital.

However any fears that the FBU would not be able to participate fully in the conference were soon dispelled as the two new delegates, Susan Morrison and Karen Hunt with conference veteran Linda Shanahan wrestled with the agenda and the running of conference.

Once the conference pre-meeting had discussed the jargon of conference; motions, composites, timings of speakers, tellers, workshops, receptions and socials – the content of the motions and who was to speak on what was a dawdle. To complicate matters slightly, Linda had organised a fringe meeting in support of the Chhokar Justice Campaign, which was to run on the Tuesday lunchtime and coincided with her contribution from the STUC Women's Committee on Violence Against Women being the last item to be called on the Tuesday morning.

After a visit to the rostrum before conference began to try it out for size, the delegation settled down to the business of conference. Agnes Tolmie, this year's Chair from UNIFI, opened the conference and welcomed delegates from 25 Trades Unions and several Trades Union Councils.

## MERGING OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Conference began and speakers made their contributions on women's representation and women and poverty and a note of panic crept in as Karen decided her perfectly good speech on the merging of emergency services was rubbish and decided to rewrite it, with less than 40 minutes before it was called. After redrafting it the remaining delegates were called in to rewrite it legibly and she legged it to the rostrum. Adrenaline is a wonderful thing. The speech was superb. Karen highlighted the necessity for local knowledge and gave examples and concentrated on the

application of Fire Survival Guidance as opposed to the ambulance control staff and their training in medical advice.

She concluded by giving the Scottish perspective and was followed by many speakers from other unions associated with the emergency services who supported the content of the motion. Many illustrations were given of some of the difficulties that would be encountered; particularly for women workers who are often the first in line for redundancy or shorter hours this would have a direct impact on their working and family lives.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Linda Shanahan had been nominated as a member of the STUC

Women's Committee to speak on Rape Legislation. Linda spoke on the fact that less than 10% of reported rapes result in a conviction due to the drawn out legal procedure and the treatment of rape survivors in court cases. She called for changes to rape laws to protect women in these situations and highlighted the growing campaign amongst the Scottish legal establishment to oppose the Scottish Executive's plans to stop alleged rapists cross examining their victims in court.

This had to be done with an eye on the clock as speakers for the fringe meeting arrived in the public gallery looking rather concerned as conference overran by 10 minutes.



Karen Hunt

## CHHOKAR JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

Frantically running to the venue for the fringe meeting we managed to start with a semblance of order as delegates trooped in to hear the speaker no doubt following the smell of curry prepared by Shad, a Chhokar supporter and transferred up to Perth in time for the meeting.

Aamer Anwar, Chhokar spokesman and campaign organiser addressed the meeting and gave a short history of the events surrounding the death of Surjit Singh Chhokar and the shameful treatment of the case and members of his family by the Police and the legal system in Scotland. The case has many parallels with the Stephen Lawrence case and that very week two youths were being prosecuted after a two-year campaign for his murder.

Unfortunately, as the meeting progressed, the fire alarm actuated and the hall had to be vacated. Time was running short





**Linda Shanahan**

as conference was due to reconvene and the FBU delegation had to make a dynamic decision on what to do next. A hustings was formed with Aamer on the step addressing a crowd and the meeting had a traditional feel as bemused passers by joined in to listen. Unfortunately the hustings had been formed on the steps of the fire exit and we were interrupted again as some FBU members arrived in three LOUD Water Ladders to run (well walk) into the building. False Alarm Apparatus!

Finally allowed back into the hall we were able to listen in peace to the developments in the case, as well as the apparent inability of the legal system in Scotland to deal with this effectively. Commitments were made to support the campaign by those in attendance and £100 collected in financial support.

## WORKSHOPS

Workshops had been arranged for delegates around the S.T.U.C. Women's Agenda for the Scottish Parliament covering:

- Women at Work
- Women in Education
- Women and the Economy
- Women making Policy
- Women's safety
- Women's health
- FBU delegates attended Education and Work whilst Linda

chaired the group on the Economy. Whilst workshops are not always the best medium to process the business of conference, the sessions included women MSPs and the opportunity to meet and discuss items of mutual interest was extremely beneficial.

## BULLYING AT WORK

Susan Morrison seconded a motion from the Women's Committee and highlighted how bullying behaviour in its many forms can be reinforced and perpetuated by institutionalised practices, rules and management culture within an organisation. The motion called on the STUC General Council and its affiliates to recognise and address institutionalised aspects of workplace bullying by tackling their own working cultures and that of employers. Susan called in her speech for improved legal recognition and redress for those exposed to workplace bullying.

## BARONESS BLOOD

Conference was then treated to a speech from Baroness Blood who had been instrumental in bringing a level of success in the Northern Ireland Peace Talks. This remarkable woman provided an inspiration to delegates as she explained how she, as an ordinary woman in the community and a group of interested women got together and decided to take action. In the space of a few years, although pilloried and laughed at initially and with no funding, now represent working women all over Northern Ireland due to their efforts and struggle for Peace.

Baroness Blood went on to explain the level of involvement they have within the Government and the pressure they can bring to ensure gender balance on all committees. She finished by quoting Eleanor Roosevelt "Someone can only make you feel inferior if you give your consent". A truly inspirational woman, conference listened in hushed silence before unanimously standing to give her a well-deserved ovation.

## RACISM AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Linda Shanahan spoke on a motion and condemned the current atmosphere of racist hysteria being perpetuated not just by the Tories but by a Labour Government and went on to condemn the decision to withdraw benefits from asylum seekers in the face of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which should guarantee refugees to be treated at least as favourably as that given the indigenous population. She went on to highlight the situation in Scotland where asylum seekers were living in atrocious conditions, abandoned and persecuted. The motion was supported by many unions and carried unanimously.

The delegation supported an emergency motion on Palestine which called for a just settlement that would restore the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to an autonomous Palestinian state and to recognise the legitimacy of the UN's declaration that refugees wishing to return to Palestine should be allowed to do so, as well as a motion calling on the UK Government to sign up to Protocol 12 of the Human Rights Act which will improve our basic civil and human rights and achieve a fairer society.

## CHHOKAR FAMILY JUSTICE CAMPAIGN



*The Chhokar family and Aamer Anwar their legal representative sat in the public gallery in November 2000, to listen to the Lord Advocate talk about the case of their murdered son Surjit Singh Chhokar. L to r: Aamer Anwar, legal representative for the family, Gurdav Chhokar, mother of Surjit, Robina Qureshi, justice campaigner, Darsham Chhokar, Surjit's father. Two men were acquitted in last November's case and a third in March 1999.*

# All they want is truth and justice

ON November 4 1998, Surjit Singh Chhokar was battered and then stabbed to death on a Lanarkshire street.

At two trials in March 1999 and November last year, it was demonstrated beyond doubt that three white men had either been present at the crime or attacked Surjit.

Yet no murder conviction was secured.

Hope for justice is all that Surjit's parents lived for, but, for the second time in two years, a crime was committed in the name of justice last November.

The case has been called Scotland's Stephen Lawrence and has rocked the criminal justice system to its foundations, with accusations that institutional racism lies at the root of the acquittals.

Some have said that this case has nothing to do with race, but we can only conclude that there are two systems of justice at work in Britain – one for the rich and a very different one for black

people and the poor.

Inequality, disparate treatment and injustice remain the hallmarks of our criminal justice system.

The Chhokars do not believe that they would have been treated in the way that they have had their son been white.

The trial verdicts were an indictment of Scottish justice that encompassed fundamental errors, professional incompetence, failure of leadership and institutional racism.

After the Lawrence inquiry, a lot of lip service was paid by the criminal justice system to anti-racism, but nothing has changed.

Yet again, another family has seen their son's killers left free to roam the streets.

Racism is rife throughout the legal establishment.

From the law schools to the corridors of the high courts, the legal establishment works like a gentlemen's club that, for



hundreds of years, has escaped criticism because nobody outside understands their language or their peculiar rituals of gowns, wigs and vanity.

They occupy a prestigious status in our society that remains unchallenged.

But there is nothing revolutionary in the Lord Advocates, Chief Constables or Ministers for Justice condemning racism and bigotry.

The real test of their conviction is what reforms they will introduce, because, so far, there have been none.

In the wake of the trial verdict, the only reason why the Lord Advocate announced two private inquiries into this case was because of the courage of a mother and father who refused to be pushed aside by the system.

From the beginning, the Chhokar family, backed by the Scottish TUC, the Stephen Lawrence Campaign and thousands across the country have demanded an independent public inquiry.

The private inquiries are unacceptable and do not have the confidence of the Chhokar family.

They were set up months in advance with a hand-picked judge from Northern Ireland to conduct a cover-up.

Despite two trials, too many questions remain unanswered.

● Why, within hours of Surjit being murdered, did the police phone a local Asian Councillor to say that it wasn't a racist murder?

● Bail for murder was only at the discretion of then Lord Advocate Lord Hardie, but, as an Asian man lay dead on a street, why were two of those accused of his killing set free to roam the streets?

● Why did no-one ever inform the Chhokars of the start of the first trial or, in the five months after Surjit's murder, explain that only one man would go to trial instead of three?

● Why were interpreters never provided in the first case to a mother and father who could speak little English?

● Why, when one man was found guilty of assault, did the prosecution never push for the imposition of a sentence and allow him to walk free?

The key difference to the Lawrence case is the role of the prosecution.

In the Chhokar case, the police had the alleged killers in their hands, but someone high up took the decision not to prosecute the three together.

In the end, as far as the killers are concerned, they committed the "perfect murder."

Only a full and genuinely independent public inquiry can begin to answer all the questions and hold those responsible accountable.

If the Chhokars' long struggle has indicated anything, it is the way in which prosecutors withhold vital information, cover up for one another, take no responsibility for their mistakes and erect a wall of silence.

The Government has claimed to be a champion of the Human Rights Act.

Yet the private inquiries go against the fundamental basis of the Human Rights Act – open justice and freedom of information.

Who is the system trying to protect and what is it so scared of finding?

If it has nothing to hide, then hold an inquiry in public!

In March 1999, all the political parties backed the family's demands for an independent public inquiry, yet now the Labour administration patronises the family and adds to their grief by refusing to sanction such an inquiry. Why?

The single most important issue to emerge from the Chhokar case is the failure of the criminal justice system to respond expertly and professionally to the trauma of a tragic event surrounding an Asian family.

If the family had not started a campaign, our guardians of law and order would not have even bothered talking to the Chhokars.

This campaign could never have got as far as it has without the tenacity, determination and perseverance of the Chhokars.

Publicly, they said little, but, when they spoke, their dignity came across and people were forced to listen and take them seriously.

The trade union movement in Scotland can be proud of the unconditional support that it has given to this family, but its support and solidarity is needed now more than ever.

The Chhokar family's demands are simple – they wish to see an independent public

inquiry into this case and how the crown office deals with ethnic minorities and victims.

They have never asked for anything special, just a fundamental human right – justice.

Did the executive really think that Surjit's life was so cheap that his family would just walk away?

They are determined to carry on fighting for the truth, accountability and justice.

■ Please send trade union affiliations and motions of support to the Chhokar Family Justice Campaign, c/o Scottish FBU, 4th Floor, 52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow G1 4AA.

We do not have the resources of the crown prosecution and have had to launch a legal appeal fund to sue the three accused in the civil courts and challenge the decision not to hold a public inquiry. Please make cheques payable to Chhokar Family Justice Campaign.

The campaign website can be found on [www.paih.org](http://www.paih.org).

PAIPHOTOS



**Surjit Chhokar**

**END SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAQ**

# Depleted uranium is nuclear war!

**Bob Pounder**  
Brigade Secretary Greater Manchester

LABOUR'S Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon is on record as saying that, "There are no risks associated with DU (depleted uranium) and certainly no proven link between its use and any illness". Whilst the British Government remains in denial the United Nations warned that NATO could face war crimes charges over the use of depleted uranium.

A waste product of the nuclear industry, DU is used in the construction of bombs, armour piercing shells and missiles. The favoured weapon of NATO, a DU missile can rip through the armour plating of a tank, like a knife through butter. The ordnance that rained down on Iraq during the six weeks of the Gulf War was largely coated with depleted uranium. The same weaponry has been used in Bosnia and the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999.

Professor Doug Rokke ex-director of the Pentagon's Depleted Uranium Project has said, "DU is the stuff of nightmares. It is toxic, radioactive and pollutes for 4,5000 million years. It causes lymphoma, neuro-psychotic disorder and short-term memory damage. In semen it causes birth defects and trashes the immune system".

Writing in the 'New Internationalist', (Poisoned Legacy, September 1999), investigative journalist, Felicity Arbuthnot wrote, "By early 1992, doctors in Iraq were bewildered by the rise in birth deformities, some so grotesque and unusual that they expected to see them in text books and perhaps once or twice in a life time. Dr Jenan Ali at Basra General Hospital in Southern Iraq has a photographic record of all the babies born with no eyes, brains, limbs, genitalia; internal organs on the outside; grotesquely deformed little heads and bodies". An Iraqi farmer had remarked that young people fear for the birth of malformed fetuses and stillbirth.

Writing in the 'Independent', January 13, 2001, Robert Fisk reported that of five thousand Serb refugees whose suburb of Sarajevo was bombed by NATO jets in the late summer of 1995, three hundred have died of cancer. The surviving refugees, who fled to Batunac, all believe that the cancers and leukaemia's are a consequence of the American A10 bombers that struck local



**Former British Army engineer Kevin Rudland at home in Hull earlier this year. He says his medical condition and the deaths of six Italian soldiers may be linked to the use of depleted uranium in cannon shells fired during Nato air strikes. Kevin, 41, served in the Territorial Army for 18 years and in the regular Army in Bosnia for just six months before returning home and setting up his own business as an engineer. Within a few months of his coming back in April 1996 the married father-of-three's hair fell out, he began to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, his teeth started to rot and he suffered from osteoarthritis.**

factories firing depleted uranium rounds. Fisk recalls the story of a six-year-old girl, Sladjena Sarenac, who had taken home the shrapnel she had found in a bomb crater near her home. Eventually, a kind of yellow sand appeared under her nails, and then her nails fell out. She complained of pains in her head and shoulders. Sladjena was taken to hospital, and received blood transfusions for two nights. Two years ago she fell into a coma for thirty hours. Back in 1995 she was diagnosed as, "Having in some way become irradiated".

Of course the civilian populations of foreign countries are not the only people to suffer the effects of depleted uranium. NATO countries have now ordered an investigation for their own service personnel, particularly in relation to what is now known as 'Gulf War or Balkan War Syndrome'. Amongst British troops, there are at least

521 dead since April 1991, and 5,000 claiming illness benefits. America admits that 32,000 of its troops deployed to the Gulf have since died and 60,000 are registered ill, which equals 28 per cent of its force deployed for the Gulf War. Australia admits that 26 per cent of its troops deployed are also ill, Canada 26 per cent and Denmark 25 per cent. The Ministry of Defence however will only admit that 7 per cent are ill.

On Thursday, January 11, the ITV 'Tonight' programme hosted by Trevor McDonald brought the scandal of DU into sharp focus. According to the 'Tonight' programme Government assurances on the relative safety of depleted uranium is being treated with cynicism and out right disbelief by the British public. After all, goes the argument; the politicians lied about BSE, so why should they be believed when it comes to DU? Particularly when service personnel continue to die in such suspiciously high numbers. The evidence is that DU is not just fatal to the people who have the misfortune to become targets for these weapons, but also for those who actually fire them.

This however, is simply quite not the end of the story. The programme quickly moved on to broadcast video footage of a serious fire that had taken place in February 1999. This fire occurred at the Royal Ordnance Speciality Metals factory at Featherstone in Wolverhampton. A factory, of course specialising in the production of DU weaponry.

The only firefighters who had any sort of protection were those committed into the building and wearing breathing apparatus. Even so, anybody near the building would have been exposed to the smoke. Dave Carter, the Fire Brigades Unions' Regional Health and Safety Co-ordinator expressed serious concern. At the time of the incident the Fire Service was unaware of the potential danger. In the aftermath of the incident Carter said that, "We've got people scared to start families – that must be terrible and that's hanging over people who are scared about it".

On the same programme Britain's leading expert on depleted



uranium, Professor Malcolm Hooper warned that thousands of people in Britain, living near manufacturing centres or test-firing ranges were at risk. Even in remote areas radioactive dust can travel twenty-five to thirty miles. In many cases the production of DU ordnance is covert and therefore not known to local people.

In the face of Government silence Professor Hooper stated: "They are frightened to ask questions because they are frightened of the answers they will get. If an association

between an illness they have seen and reported and DU can be made, then they will have lost a valuable weapon. They will be shown to have made a faulty judgement and thirdly they will be faced with the problem of decontaminating the environment, which would be an absolutely massive expense".

Former army engineer Kevin Rudland returned from Bosnia in 1996, where he had repaired tanks. Today he now suffers from the characteristic leukaemia type symptoms as a consequence of handling DU. Bringing the 'Tonight' programme to a close his message to the Government was simple and direct, "Just give in,

just say sorry and get it sorted out, because you are putting a lot of people's lives at risk"

The Fire Brigades Union called for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq at its 1998 Annual Conference. In 1999 the Union's Annual

Conference called for an end to the bombing of Yugoslavia. The horrors of recent wars and sanctions are now clear and obvious to everyone.

Speaking in Manchester three years ago, then National Officer Andy Gilchrist, speaking against the sanctions on Iraq, said that, "No man is an island." Today that message is stronger than ever. The use of depleted uranium is a form of nuclear war that can only serve to emphasise and underline the reason why trade unions cannot remain aloof from international politics.

We should begin by asking ourselves who is in possession of the real weapons of mass destruction and who the real war criminals really are.

**At the time of the incident the Fire Service was unaware of the potential danger. In the aftermath of the incident Carter said that, 'We've got people scared to start families'**



**Victims of NATO's war**





## OFFICERS NATIONAL COMMITTEE AGM



*The top table with Andy Gilchrist speaking*

# Marrying a proud past with a bold future

**Bill Walford**  
Publicity Officer

THE Officers AGM was held on Monday 20 November 2000 at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield. Delegates from all regions were present.

The day prior was the ONC AGM. Various changes were made to the Executive of the Committee as brother Jack Ford the ONC Sec. had been successful in being elected as Officers Executive Council Member. Paul Smyth No. 2 Region was unanimously elected as ONC Secretary for a period of four years. Alan Morris was elected as ONC Vice Chair. Ian Shaw the existing ONC Chair



**ONC Vice Chair Alan Morris**

now is leader of a new Team. Ian has many years service with the ONC. Dave Matthews is now the Lead Officer for the minority groups and the AGM recognised the excellent service Mike Fordham (AGS) had given to the Officers Section.

Ian Shaw opened the meeting and the new Chair of Standing Orders Kay Vernalis presented the Standing Orders Report as though she had done it many times before. This was Kay's first time in presenting the Standing Orders and it's quite obvious that she will be an excellent replacement for Alex Merry.

Ian Shaw introduced the top table and Andy Gilchrist made an opening address to the AGM. Andy was pleased to have the opportunity to speak to us, the CSNC and Retained Committee

and went on to say that he would be addressing the very first formal AGMs of the black members, women and gay and lesbian groups. This, he said, gave him great pleasure and pride. The General Secretary's intention is to marry our proud past with a bold future for the FBU. He went on to say that our Union is held in high regard in the wider Trade Union and Labour Movement, not just in the UK, but throughout the World. We are seen as a strong and progressive Union, both traits he is determined to continue and wherever possible enhance.

Andy hopes all our National and Sectional Committees will make it their job to have a wider vision than just the UK Fire Service, or indeed just the narrow sectional interest of their group. He specifically paid reference to Equal Opportunities in the Fire Service and within the FBU. He said it had been controversial, provoked strong reactions but is confident that the route we have taken is the right one and he is absolutely committed to Equal Opportunities for all and his opening address was well received by the Delegation.

Brother Jack Ford gave the ONC Secretary's Report detailing the work carried out by the Union and in particular the work undertaken by the ONC during the past twelve months.

### ONGOING PROJECTS

#### OFFICER RIDERSHIP FACTOR

An interim Report was issued earlier this year, which recommended use of the Home Office Incident Command Guidance (span of command) as the basis for determining Officer requirements (operationally) within Brigades.

It identified the need to develop the issues further, including examining Brigade responses to the HMI expectations documents, in particular the question on how many FDS Officers they each had and how those figures had been derived?

Ridership was the subject of the ONC Seminar this year and

our views will be undertaken by the Sub Committee and fed into the CFBAC Fire Cover Review Task Group.

The timing of this is particularly appropriate, as the Fire Cover Review has reached the stage whereby the Risk Assessment stage is now completed; the logical progression from size of attendance is to levels of Incident Command.

## OFFICER DATABASE

The ONC has both hard and soft copy of Officer Members and will be updated soon and work continues to develop this source for reference information. It is intended to make this information available via the Internet at the main FBU site or through a dedicated ONC Server.

## LONE WORKING

The best practice guidance issued in April 2000 is being widely used by Brigade Reps.

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

An interim Report was issued earlier this year giving best practice advice. Development of more detailed guidance is in progress and will be presented to the Executive Council for consideration in due course. Further work including a number of issues raised by last year's resolutions are being undertaken, detailing job descriptions, personal specifications and national standards on promotion.

## NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL

The NJC have now resumed meeting. It has agreed a new constitution taking account of the Burchill Recommendations, these include an independent chair, a Standing Sub Committee, a revised procedure for settling differences, abolition of the Officers and Lower Ranks Committees and amendments to the full National Joint Councils.

## BSI COMMITTEES

Members of the ONC represent the FBU on the following Committees, Fixed Firefighting Systems, Fire Protection in Buildings and Light Structures, Means of Escape, Construction and Management of Fire Safety also Firefighters Gloves, Protective Clothing Against Chemicals, The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances, Flammable Substances, Explosives Expectorate Review and Emergency Plans.

## THE FIRE SAFETY BILL

Although there has been all round support for developing this all encompassing legislation a lack of Parliamentary time has prevented progress.

As a result use of the Regulatory Reform Bill is proposed by the Government, as a method of rationalising elements of existing Fire Safety legislation.

Whilst the FBU would welcome this, it is our view that this should be as a precursor to the implementation of the Fire Safety Bill and not instead of it.

## THE ARSON CONTROL FORUM

This forum first met in November of this year, the Union being represented by the Assistant General Secretary. The implementation of four sub-committees 'Intervention', 'Legislation', 'Research and Date' and 'New Projects' was agreed and members of the ONC will contribute to this process.

Members of the ONC will continue to assist National Officials to develop all of these very important initiatives.

Should you, the reader, want further details of any of the above projects, please contact your ONC Representative or your Brigade Officer Rep.

## RESOLUTIONS CARRIED AT AGM 2000

- 1 Renegotiate the ECU scheme
- 2 Recognition of stress amongst Officer members
- 3 Emergency vehicle driver training for Officers
- 4 Structured training programme for Fire Service Managers
- 5 Stop Home Office interference in the running of Fire Brigades
- 6 Defend Officer posts on Brigade restructures
- 7 Comply with the Grey Book/Fire Service Rank Structure
- 8 Station Officer rank appropriate to Inspecting Officers Fire Safety
- 9 Oppose mergers and joint Emergency Control Rooms
- 10 A National Lone Working Policy in Brigades
- 11 Filling of temporary posts (28 days)
- 12 Burchill Report commitment to progress matters
- 13 Protect Conditions of Service (Public Holiday Leave)
- 14 ICS correct levels of responsibility
- 15 Blue Light Mobilising criteria

Brother Steve Tottie Region 9 moved Resolution No. 8 referring to Station Officers Fire Safety. He said: "We have already heard in the Chair and Secs. Annual Report concerning cuts in Officer posts and the holding open of the vacancies. Members of whatever rank will be and are carrying out additional functions and added responsibilities. Their health and safety and increased stress levels will be affected".

"A reduction in Officer posts in Fire Safety Departments is another further attack. Nothing more than Fire Safety and our legislative and public protection role and responsibilities on the cheap!

"Of course, Departments will continue to function, send newly appointed Junior Officers to the Fire Service College, pay for their training for the Inspecting Officer modules but refrain from further levels of training or career progression. In general those in Departments are left to get on with it.

"We must ensure that the rank of Specialist Fire Safety Officer



Steve Tottie

# OFFICERS NATIONAL COMMITTEE AGM



CUBA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN DAY CONFERENCE

## **CUBA IN CONTEXT: HISTORY, POLITICS AND CULTURE**

Sunday, 1 April 2001

10am registration – ends 4.00pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

(tube: Holborn)

Day school tickets £4 (£3 Conc), £6 (solidarity price)

**JOIN US** and find out about the Revolution, Cuban history and current issues

**JOIN US** in celebrating Cuba's rich and diverse cultural achievements

**FIND OUT** how the blockade impacts on the lives of Cubans and why you should be part of the growing campaign against the US blockade

### **Workshop sessions including:**

The politics of human dignity; the process of socialist development

● Cuba's foreign policy ● Ideology and the Revolution ● Playa Giron (The Bay of Pigs); a lesson from history ● Economic reform and the capitalist press ● Cuban culture and film ● Bacardi and the Cuban exile movement ● Cuba and advances for women ● Cuban music and dance ● Afro-Cuban poetry ... including films, dance sessions, readings, art and music ...

**ORGANISED BY THE CUBA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN**  
**TEL: 020 7263 6452**

### **SPEAKERS INCLUDE:**

Luis Marrn (Instituto Cubanos de Amistad Con Los Pueblos, Havana) Zenen Enrique Santana Delgado (Institute of International Relations, Havana) Homero Gonzalez (Dance Academy – Cuba) Alice Mahon MP Hernando Calvo Ospina (author of The Cuban Exile Movement) George Lambie (De Montfort University) Ken Cole (University of East Anglia) Claudia Hasanbegovic (University of Kent) Conrad James (University of Birmingham) Steve Wilkinson (Editor of Cuba Si) Francisco Dominguez (Middlesex University) Michael Chanan (Author of the Cuban Image)

**Register in advance or on the door**

## **EVENING FIESTA AT CONWAY HALL SATURDAY, 31ST MARCH 2001**

Fiesta for CUBA and NICARAGUA with RAICES CUBANAS 10 piece, all Cuban spectacular salsa band, CUBAN DANCE DISPLAY AND CLASS, and CLUB CLANDESTINO with the best Latin sounds

**Venue: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square.**

**Food and bar from 7.30pm, ends Midnight.**

**Fiesta tickets £7.50, £4.50 (concs)**

### **CSC members note:**

CSC National AGM Saturday, 31st March 2001.

Registration 10am. Venue: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.

Afternoon workshop on developing trade union solidarity with Cuba – an opportunity to get to know each other and share experiences

CSC, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG

Tel: 020 7263 6452 Fax: 020 7561 0191

E-mail: [office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk](mailto:office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk)

Visit our websites: <http://www.poptel.org.uk/cuba-solidarity/> and [www.cubaconnect.co.uk](http://www.cubaconnect.co.uk)



*Jim Wood  
and  
Jack Ford*

must remain at Station Officer rank. Major planning and complex Certification must have the appropriate rank dealing with it. It is concerning that some Brigades may no longer have dedicated Specialist Fire Safety Officers at Station Officer rank. This must stop as it is detrimental and many Chief Officers have addressed this reduction on the back of Best Value. It's Fire Safety on the cheap and not in the interest of our Officer members".

The resolution was carried unanimously.

Martin Oldknow Region No. 4 moved Resolution No.9 which opposed the merger and Joint Emergency Controls and advised members that severe implications for public and Firefighter safety with increased possibility of loss of life could be seen if such mergers went ahead. Furthermore there would be a

worsening of call handling times, loss of essential local knowledge, no identified service delivery benefits and rather than improving Conditions of Service for all it is clear conditions would worsen for the Fire Service.

The Resolution was passed unanimously by the Delegation.

At the close of the meeting delegates did comment and recognise the excellent service provided by the Staff at Wortley Hall and have witnessed a year upon year improvement since we have been using that venue.

The meeting was closed by the National President Mick Harper.



*Martin Oldknow*



*Mick Harper*





To the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister

On call upon the Green Court to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to return KLF funds to their appropriate form of public ownership in the interests of public safety and the efficient management of the network. Such legislation is also envisaged in order to restore patronage and management control within the railways.

## References

· 84671.24

PLEASE RETURN TO ARRANGE THAT TAKE BACK THE TRACK, ASLOC, 2  
ATKOR, 101 ROAD HAMPSHIRE, LONDON NW9 6AB BY 30<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2001

# RAILWAYS – PROFITS BEFORE SAFETY?

## Dear Firefighter

How much would you pay for a second rate car? Not much I bet, if anything at all. So why are we continually paying for a second rate railway system whilst suffering crowded conditions, emergency timetables and continual ad hoc repairs to an out of date, unsafe system that has resulted in a string of tragedies, followed by plenty of hand wringing and empty promises from Governments and companies alike?

"But I don't use the railways," you may say. You're still paying for them though.

Let's have a look at the facts. There are 25 franchise companies

## Dear Firefighter

I am writing to ask for your support for the “Take Back the Track” campaign, which has recently been launched by the rail Unions.

The primary objective of the campaign is to restore Railtrack to public ownership as a first stage in the re-establishment of a publicly owned railway industry. The campaign has already attracted a lot of support including over one hundred MPs, both Labour and Liberal Democrat and opinion polls show that the majority of the public is in favour of returning Railtrack to public ownership.

The campaign aims to attract a wide range of support from organisations including the trade unions, different political parties, environmental organisations, passenger groups and community representatives.

The centrepiece of the campaign is the “Take Back the Track” petition, which we intend to present to the Prime Minister in early April.

There are a number of different ways in which your Union can get involved and support the campaign, for example:

Distribute the enclosed petition as widely as possible to  
Branches, activists and members

Help publicise the campaign by carrying articles in Union journals

Make a donation to the campaign fund (make cheques payable to "Take Back the Track" and send to the Campaign Coordinator at Aslef)

For further information, campaign materials and prepared articles please contact me, the "Take Back the Track" Campaign Co-ordinator at Aslef Head Office.

**Jenny Smith, Campaign Co-ordinator**

**Take back the track. Aslef, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB**

■ Petition Forms are available from your Brigade Secretary

## LETTERS

now running our privatised train services. These companies have been receiving huge public subsidies (our money!), since privatisation got under way. The strategic Rail Authority, which was set up by the Government, shows in their own figures, that since 1995-6, franchise holders have received a net figure of over £4.2 billion of public money. So why are our railways in such a state of disrepair? Well, Railtrack has had most of the blame laid firmly at its door. It's a familiar story of profits first.

Last November, just a month after four lives were lost in the Hatfield disaster, the company announced that it was raising its half-year dividend to shareholders by 5%, despite a pre-tax fall of 31% to £175 million. Vernon Hince, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT stated, "That money is public money and should be spent on improving the railways – not bigger profits for shareholders." The then Chief of Railtrack, Gerald Corbett, defended the decision as "a vote of confidence in the future." His confidence had probably been boosted by an earlier announcement that Railtrack was to receive a further five-year grant of £4.7 billion of Government money (ours!), to "deliver a modern, safe railway with greater public accountability."

But, (and no surprises here), none of this money has benefited the workforce. The number of employees of all 25 franchises fell by over 7,000 between 1995-6 and the latest financial year. Passengers haven't benefited either. As well as the delays and reductions in safety, fares have risen above the levels of inflation.

So what can Trade Unionists do about it?

Well, we could start by supporting the "Take Back the Track" campaign launched recently by the rail Unions to restore Railtrack to public ownership as a first stage to a re-nationalised railway industry. An industry that puts public safety and service before fat cats profits. After all, our families use the railways; our members have to deal with the traumatic results of accidents and (you don't see this in the popular press), six out of ten members of the public support re-nationalisation according to a recent survey.

So support the "Take Back the Track" campaign by completing the petitions on your notice board. If they are not there, ask your Branch Official to obtain them from your Regional Office.

And if you don't want to support the campaign? Well, let's have another look at that crap car again!

**Ashley Drage**  
Region 10

## COUNTDOWN TO CATASTROPHE

Dear Firefighter,

On November 29, last year, Scottish Friends of Palestine launched their latest book *Countdown to Catastrophe* in the Scottish Parliament Building. It was also an occasion for the launch of an all-party committee on Palestine within the Parliament.

The book, a 375 page daily chronology of events in Palestine in 1948, has been endorsed by Afif Safieh, the Palestinian General Delegate to the UK.

The book is a unique publication, drawing upon, and drawing together contemporary reports in Palestine in 1948 and subsequent details revealed by Israeli and Palestinian historians. This book has a momentum of its own, unravelling the catastrophe which overtook the Palestinian people in 1948.

For those who have little knowledge of events in 1948, it is an essential read. For those who are aware of events, it is an excellent read.

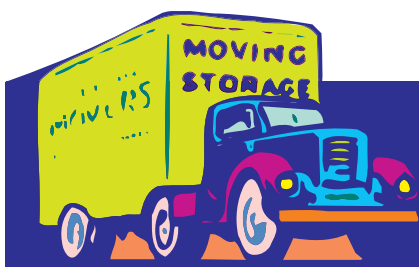
The book also carries a strong endorsement from Bill Speirs, General Secretary of the STUC. Bill, as you may know, has a long-standing interest in Palestinian issues and is Hon President of Scottish Friends of Palestine.

Those who know Bill will recognise his inimitable style in his endorsement. And it comes from the heart. The anecdote outlined in the endorsement has had a strong influence on Bill's life ever since.

The current situation in Palestine/Israel is fluid and dangerous. For the Palestinians under occupation it is increasingly desperate. The book highlights the roots behind the conflict in Palestine. For those with a perspective on international affairs and world peace and concern for the rights of others it is an informative book. If there ever has to be peace, with an element of justice, in the Middle East – if individuals have to play their part in creating a peaceful world, then possession of the facts is a first essential.

**BRITAIN, PALESTINE, ISRAEL AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT**

Thirty-two years ago, in the John Neilson High School in Paisley, my pal Billy Mathieson was told to argue "for the Arabs" in a class debate to be held the following week. The issue for debate



## ON THE MOVE?

*Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.*

was: "Are you for the Arabs or the Jews?"

We all felt sorry for him. It was just a year after the 6 Day War of 1967, when we had all cheered on the Israeli air force and army as they smashed the Arabs. We could not understand why the Arabs wanted to "drive the Jews into the sea", out of Israel, the land they had lived in for 2000 years. How could they want to do this? Why had the British army not killed these Arab Nazis?

We felt really sorry for Billy, and he felt really sorry for himself, as he set off for the library.

A week later, Billy told us that when the Nazis came to power in Germany, the land that was now Israel was then called Palestine and that most of the people who lived there were Christian and Moslem Arabs. He told us that Jews had lived peacefully in Palestine for centuries and that Palestinians had taken Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution into their homes. He told us that Scottish and English and other European Christians had tortured and killed Jews for centuries.

He told us that it wasn't only Germans who guarded and operated the death camps: there were Austrians, and Ukrainians, and Hungarians and many other Europeans.

There were no Palestinians guarding Dachau or Belsen, he said.

At the end of the debate the class voted for "the Jews". I asked Billy if what he said was all true. He said he didn't know, but it was what was in the books and newspaper cuttings he found in the library and it had really upset him.

I had never treated a school debate seriously before, but in the hours and days afterwards, I checked things out and became more and more angry about having been lied to. It changed my life.

Read this book. Read the contemporary accounts of what happened when the state of Israel was established.

And understand that every price paid by the Palestinians then and yesterday and today, has been in payment of debts to the Jewish people incurred not by Palestinians, but by those who looked the other way as Hitler snapped his fingers.

Read this book.

Copies can be obtained from:

Scottish Friends of Palestine, 31 Tinto Road, Glasgow G43 2AL

Priced £7.50 + £2 p&p

Please contact: Hugh Humphries, Scottish Friends of Palestine (0141 637 8046) if you have any queries or require further information.

## YOU HAVE THE POLICIES, FIGHT FOR THEM

Dear Firefighter,

In Response to articles in Firefighter issue January 2001.

As a now avid reader of Firefighter, not just in the smallest room on the Fire Station, I have at last taken the major leap of writing to and risking the knife of the editorial team.

On the issue of Control Rooms, Tam Tierney and I have not always agreed on certain issues, but on this one we can agree. Now living in Cornwall (on a pension fought for and maintained by the FBU through its policies), the importance of local controls is a major issue. Local Councillors and MPs insist on maintaining local controls and the local knowledge they experience. If we don't fight for our policies, we might as well give the mobilising to the 4th emergency service; you know they can fit it in among breakdowns or they "know a man who can".

On the sentiment of upholding Conference policies (flash hoods excepted), the article on the Thematic Review by another "Turney", (does no-one else write to the Firefighter?)

The issue of single tier entry is again Conference policy, although I accept that on obtaining Brigade responsibility some Senior Officers have amnesia, even forgetting that a vast majority of them were once members of the FBU and heaven forbid, some were even Senior Officials and attended Conference.

To have a Chief Executive appointed by whom, Government, local politicians even the local Masonic Lodge, wouldn't work any better. We must change the culture from inside by fighting for issues we at Conference have decided are important. The FBU isn't a talking shop, it never has been, it must not become one. You have the policies, FIGHT for them.

**Dick Trinder**

**OOT Member – Ex Chair ONC**

## TELL KEN TO KEEP HIS HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS

Dear Firefighter,

I was dismayed to hear from the media, that in his quest to get his hands on (anyone's) money to fund his various ambitions, Ken Livingstone has suggested (once again), that money be borrowed from the Retirement Fund of the LFCDA firefighters.

Those of us who are old enough to remember this devious man from his term as Leader of the GLC will know that he has tried this tack once before and was promptly told to "sling his hook". I do hope no one will be silly enough to fall for his glib tongue on this occasion either.

Since it was only a matter of months' ago that the LFCDA was wringing its hands and saying it couldn't cope with the financial drain of retired firefighters, I find it incomprehensible that the idea should even be mooted; except by "Son of Maxwell" of course.

**Bill Langworth**

**OOT Member**

Send your letters to The Firefighter, FBU,  
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,  
Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE



## LETTERS

## GOOD THAT FBU IS KEEN TO REMEMBER PAST ACTIVISTS

Dear Firefighter

I would like to thank Andy Gilchrist for his letter of 18 December 2000, together with "Forged in Fire", which I very much appreciate. It is good to know that the FBU is keen to remember its past activists.

I joined the AFS in London in October 1940 and the Fire Brigades Union on my first day out of training school. Throughout the war I served at New Cross and Deptford fire stations.

I went through the latter part of the blitz and the V1 and V2 assault in the summer and autumn of 1944. At the end of the war I decided to stay in the London Fire Brigade and finally retired in June 1964.

Throughout my FBU membership I was an active member serving both as Branch Chair and as a member of C Division District Committee.

I met and knew many FBU National Officials such as John Horner and Jack Grahl and worked with local activists such as "Nobby" Keyes, George Page and John Henry (badly burnt in a fire at Grove Park and later to become Mayor of Lewisham).

I am still an out of trade member of the FBU and continue to enjoy reading the "Firefighter".

**V.J. Andrews**

IT'S BUSINESS,  
NOT PERSONAL

Dear Firefighter

On the 28th of June 1996 I was a crew member in a Dennis DS fire appliance which turned over whilst proceeding to an incident.

Approximately two weeks after the accident I developed sleep problems that became more severe as time progressed. In addition I began to experience dreams and what I later learnt to be flashbacks.

The flashbacks are particularly upsetting in that when you experience them you are back in the accident scenario and cannot think about much else at that time.

I went and saw my family Doctor who referred me to a local clinic where I began to attend counselling, at the same time I notified my Brigade that I was having problems and was undergoing treatment.

You probably will not be surprised that I did not hear any more from them until four years later! More of which in a moment.

I had requested legal assistance from the union and received a letter from Thompsons who after receiving all my information had arranged for me to see Dr Gordon Turnbull at his clinic in

Wroughton near Swindon. Dr Turnbull is a world renowned psychiatrist; he was asked to debrief and counsel Terry Waite, John McCarthy and the SAS troops captured in the Gulf war.

This shows the level of care and service our union provides for us.

Dr Turnbull diagnosed that I was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and wrote to my GP suggesting a course of treatment and invited him to telephone him for any further advice. He also said that I would require specialist counselling and recommended a counsellor in Plymouth, Mr John Campbell-Beattie.

At around this time I bumped into an ACO at my station and told him what I thought of the duty of care I had received from the Brigade.

His unhelpful reply is the title of this letter and so it was no surprise to me when Thompsons subsequently had difficulty obtaining copies of accident investigation reports, training records, photographs etc from the brigade.

I could not start the specialised counselling for fourteen months because the brigade's solicitors would not agree to fund it until I saw a Psychiatrist employed by them. This I did in December 1999. He agreed with Dr Turnbull's diagnosis and I commenced the counselling in March 2000.

In over four years I received no assistance or further enquiries from the brigade, even though in this time I had attended an over 40s medical and several fitness tests and each time I had informed the doctor or nurse of my condition and treatment.

Yet, one month before my case was due to be heard in court, I received a letter from the occupational health unit requesting my attendance at a medical review. I attended and was asked questions about the accident such as "were you wearing a seatbelt?"

I declined to answer and pointed out in my file the letter I had written and the comments made on results of the over 40s medical and fitness tests relating to my treatment.

When I asked the Doctor why I was receiving attention now and not before, the answer was "I cannot comment on that". I considered this treatment was bordering on bullying and reported the matter to my solicitor at Thompsons, Richard Grayson, who wrote the Brigade a letter of protest.

Two weeks before the court date I received an offer to settle out of court. Richard Grayson advised me to refuse, and a week later a better and acceptable offer was made.

In conclusion I wish to thank Gordon Turnbull and John Campbell-Beattie for their medical care, Richard Grayson of Thompsons, Bristol, for his unstinting hard work, and our Union, which is a superb institution most of us take for granted.

I sincerely hope those of you that read this never need to call on our union for assistance, but if you do, take it from me our union delivers like no other.

**Pat Tyler**

**Stn 18 Paignton, Devon, Region 14**

**THE WORKING FAMILIES TAX CREDIT**

new Labour  
new Britain

**The new  
Children's Tax Credit**

**Up to £10 a week extra for families**

Labour  
www.labour.org.uk

## How does WFTC help working families?

THE Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) is a central part of the Government's drive to make work pay and tackle child poverty. It was launched in October 1999. Over 1.1 million families are now receiving WFTC – 300,000 more than Family Credit, which it replaced. On average, the WFTC boosts family income by £77 per week – £30 more than Family Credit.

By cutting tax bills WFTC ensures an income of at least £208 a week for full time work (£214 from April). And it means that there is no net income tax to pay until family income reaches £245 a week (£255 from this April).

WFTC also includes a generous childcare tax credit component. This pays up to 70% of eligible childcare costs up to a maximum of £70 per week for families with one child and £105 for families with two or more children. Over 100,000 families are benefiting from this extra help with childcare costs.

WFTC pays out £5 billion a year in help to working families – worth on average an extra £30 more than family credit to the 1.1 million families receiving it.

The WFTC is central to our modernisation of the tax and benefit system to remove the barriers created by the unemployment and poverty traps and improve rewards from work. The WFTC is reinforced by other reforms introduced to support working families. These include the minimum wage, the 10p starting rate of income tax, increases in child benefit, the new Children's Tax Credit and raising the starting threshold for NIC contributions. Taken together the reforms made during this Parliament will mean that the direct tax burden on a typical family (single earner family with two children on average earnings) is at its lowest level since 1972.

### HOW DOES WFTC WORK?

To be eligible one parent must work 16 hours or more a week, be responsible for at least one dependent child or young person and have savings of £8,000 or less. The amount of WFTC available is dependent on circumstances i.e. income, number of hours

worked each week, number and ages of children, savings and childcare costs.

WFTC has four parts:

- A basic tax credit – £53.15
- A 30 hour credit (working over 30 hours) – £11.25
- A tax credit for each child:  
Age: 0-15: £25.60; Age 16-18: £26.35
- The childcare credit – up to 70% of eligible costs up to maximum costs of £100 for one child and £150 for two or more children.

The WFTC award is calculated by adding the credits together. If the family income (after tax and National Insurance contributions) is above £91.45 per week, the WFTC is reduced by 55p for each £1 above £91.45. The credit for childcare costs does not reduce as income rises.

### THE CHOICE

Labour plans to build on the WFTC as a first step towards making the tax and benefit system pay for working families. The new Children's Tax Credit, which starts in April reinforces the WFTC and will mean around five million families gain up to £520 a year – a £10 a week family tax cut.

Our commitment to working families is clear. But the Tories would abolish the WFTC, hurting over 1 million families. They would axe the New Deal that has helped 250,000 young people into work.

And we all remember the 22 Tory tax rises. They are committed to making the same mistakes again with £16 billion of cuts from public services and irresponsible tax cuts based on bogus savings. Their plans would mean a return to the old Tory boom and bust that hurt millions of families, with higher unemployment and higher mortgage payments.

■ Call the WFTC response line free on 0800 597 5976 if you think you may be eligible. For information on the WFTC and the Children's Tax Credit, call the tax credit Helpline on 0845 609 5000.



# 25 YEAR BADGES



John Cairns presents Bobby King, John McSeveney and George King with their 25 year badges as Ian McKie looks on at Shotts Branch, Scotland



East Kilbride, Strathclyde, Branch Secretary Jim Milne presents Alan Blyth with his 25 year badge



Rab Cunningham, Hamilton Branch, Strathclyde receives his 25 year badge from Patrick Hampsey, E/Division Secretary



Andy Edwards receives his 25 year badge from Gordon Vassell



Jerry Harper receives his 25 year badge from Steve Paine, EC Member Region 13, at Reading



Bobby Kirk of Coatbridge Branch receives his 25 year badge from John Cairns, E/Division Chair Strathclyde



Gus Kirkland of Lanark Branch, Strathclyde, receives his 25 year badge from E/Division Chair John Cairns. Branch Official Kenny Gray looks on



Bill March receives his 25 year badge from Steve Paine, EC member Region 13, in Reading



Steve Martin, Branch Secretary Shadwell, London, and East Group 5 Chair, receives his 25 year badge from Group Secretary Matt Wrack



Berkshire Brigade Membership Secretary, Cliff McFadden, receives his 25 year badge from Region 13 Chair Peter Miller Reading



Trevor Monson receives his 25 year badge from South Yorkshire Brigade Secretary Paul Matthewman



Cumbria Brigade Chair Martin Ogilvie receives his 25 year badge from General Secretary Andy Gilchrist at Regional AGM in Morecambe



Liam Diver, Brigade Chair, presents Keith Sommerfield with his 25 year badge



Steve Strelitz, Bethnal Green, receiving his 25 year badge and gift from London Region Secretary Mick Shergold and Group Secretary Matt Wrack



J Tracey, Alloa Branch, and J Young, Stirling Branch, receive their 25 year badges from John McGhee, EC Member Region 1